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The Thirst for Islamic Knowledge in the Digital Era

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Abstract

In this research, I attempt to investigate the new media as an alternative for acquiring ilmu shari'i. The decline of the conventional way for many reasons, in addition to the revolutionary development of technology, has encouraged many people to follow up differently to acknowledge Islam and Islamic knowledge. I also argue that these online platforms help Muslim youth confirm their identity through their attraction to social media. I consider the case of Ahmed Al Sayed and his influence on Muslim youth in the Arab world. In this research, I analyse social media interaction among Muslim youths using the qualitative research method. This study contributes to understanding the impact of the age of technological transformation on youths seeking Islamic knowledge.

Keywords: digital, Islamic knowledge, the Arab world, traditional, Muslim youth



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Introduction

Thanks to the rapid advancement of technology, everyone can now get all the information they require with a single touch. This is what is meant by online Islamic lessons. We can look up Islam to see how it is a set of rules and regulations intended to improve your life. Many websites on the Internet discuss Islam and Muslims. Online learning is a smart choice due to the fantastic opportunity to increase our knowledge and receive what we need in minutes. Islam appears to be one of many religions that use the Internet as a new medium for learning about religion or even as a location for religious activity (Helland, 2005; Fakhruroji, 2019).

Even while it is critical to acknowledge that there is a spectrum when evaluating online religious engagement on websites, control issues regarding interaction levels cannot be discounted. The interaction with Islamic online courses can be a trigger for confirming Muslims' identity. The practice of Islamic study implies the articulation of their Muslim identity in addition to signifying religious participation (Fakhruroji, 2019). Especially for Muslim minorities; however, in this research, I'm exploring the effect of digitalisation of Islamic education in the Arab world where Muslims are not a minority, but I am raising this question: do all Muslims need to confirm their identity through online Islamic education or by interacting with it on social media? Am I also wondering If online learning about Islamic studies can be a step for integrating religion with secular?

However, it's rare to find previous studies conducted on digital Islam education in the Middle East, especially in the Arab world. Therefore, I focus this study on digital Islamic education among Muslim youth. In many technology studies, the subject of religion has frequently been disregarded. The social development of cultural spaces still heavily relies on religion. Nevertheless, organised systems of spiritual beliefs are called religion in this context (Campbell, 2005). One method by which religiously linked universities and colleges are addressing this need to reconcile the spiritual with the secular is through distance learning (Rogers & Howell, 2004).

Nowadays, technology helps disseminate Islamic knowledge as a process of renewing and reproducing knowledge. What is meant by reproducing knowledge in the science of da'wah does not mean making a rupture of knowledge with traditional thought or religious and cultural heritage in calling to God Almighty, then creating modern knowledge based on science. And the modern mind, as it is known to Westerners and modernists, but what is meant here is the production of new religious knowledge in a form that suits the individual's Islamic social, cultural, educational, and religious needs and in a way that helps each individual to make the right decisions that suit him.

Hence the need to reproduce knowledge, "Each era, legacy and their issues, which are characterised by various ages, which calls for the opinions and followers of their time and their location, so as not to get scared between personality and era, especially with the developments that appeared is the best proof of the need to be diligent for the spirit of the spirit of the times, and his elimination, and finding a site favoured by the Muslim personal, in

the midst of this momentum of rapid variables, which occur on the world and Ibnul Qayyim says:” Whoever gives people fatwa once the books are transferred to differences and their returns, their guards, their conditions and their status, lost and I have lost, and I was a greater religion than a felony of all people, on a difference Their country and their returns and their organs, including one book of medicine books. Research questions are based on my observation of the increase in these online Islamic courses. Therefore, some questions are headed to be answered in this research paper. Moreover, I will explore whether these online Islamic programs can be a good alternative to the traditional way of teaching legal knowledge and Islamic thought.

Literature Review

Mandaville (1999) states that some of the most exciting developments may be taking place online. However, Internet use continues to be a source of concern for religious communities because it exacerbates the conflict between tradition and modernity, which is common in societies with a traditional orientation (Golan & Stadler, 2016). Regarding this novel phenomenon, several studies have been published. However, their conclusions are still unclear and contradictory.

Cultural modernisation causes a broad range of changes in cultures’ values, customs, and attitudes. For instance, globalisation has produced significant political, economic, transportation, and communication advancements. Furthermore, ideas and actions have been impacted by modernisation. In essence, modernisation entails a complete restructuring of conventional communal life into a sustainable pattern set against technological advances (Syeed, 2022). For a considerable period, modern-day adherents of Islam have engaged in discussions and deliberations over the potential benefits and practicality of incorporating electronic information technology in managing and disseminating religious knowledge (Mandaville, 1999).

As the Internet has become more established in our daily lives, more attention has been drawn to the reality that the online and offline worlds are inextricably linked (Campbell & Lövheim, 2011). On the other hand, the Internet has become a medium that facilitates the acquirement of knowledge and simultaneously eliminates geographical and temporal barriers (Nurdin, 2022). Muslims adopt the Internet at the same rate as other religious communities to disseminate religious teachings and knowledge. Nonetheless, certain theological teachings are more challenging to locate online (Nurdin, 2022). The widespread availability of social media and other digital media has contributed to the present transition of Islamic education among young adults. Three reasons can be given for this. First, there are no restrictions on when or when we can access the Internet, and it’s cheap. Students are frequently observed utilising their cell phones to look up information for their pals during presentations in class. Service providers have reduced the cost of communications by making data bundles widely accessible. Students can quickly find textual answers using smartphones and search engines (Pabbajah et al., 2021).

Today's ideal solution for education cannot rely solely on rigid academic interactions between professors and students. While academic rigour is necessary, it is not enough to raise the level and standard of education (Purrostami, 2012). Additional criteria must exist to engage students and foster a love of learning. One of these factors is making an emotional and empathic connection with students. It means understanding their unique perspectives, backgrounds, and challenges and creating a safe space for them to share their thoughts and ideas. When students feel seen, heard, and valued by their teachers, they are more likely to be motivated to learn and succeed. This approach also helps to create a more inclusive learning environment that celebrates diversity and promotes equity. By prioritising emotional connection alongside academic rigour, we can create a more holistic approach to education that benefits all students.

The emergence of new media has led to a reconfiguration of audiences, transforming them into communities. This shift can be attributed to the increased similarities between senders and receivers, not only in terms of shared interests but also in terms of cultural style and social standing (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003). Therefore, the case I am exploring in this article reflects the idea of the transformation into communities as they follow each other. They also create hashtags and tweet with these hashtags. They create groups to encourage each other to follow up with the course.

Many studies have focused on the Internet and e-learning. Some other studies highlighted the role of Islamic websites in distributing Islamic knowledge. On the other hand, some scholars studied how Muslim communities interact digitally. However, there is no study about the youth and their demand for Islamic knowledge on social media and how the Islamic influencer attracts the youth through social media platforms, creates content that appeals to the youth's minds, and motivates them to join their programs and podcasting. Therefore, I'm trying to fill the gap in the research to answer these questions: First, why do Muslim youth seek Islamic knowledge through social media? Second, how do the Muslim youth network their Islamic knowledge through social media, especially the Twitter platform? In this vein, I take the case of Ahmed Al-Sayyed's account and his programs, which attracted many Muslim youth in the Arab world.

This study uses a qualitative method to examine why Muslim youths acquire more Islamic knowledge through the Internet and social media public figures. The data are collected by analysing social media accounts and exploring the literature written on digital Islam and digitalising Islamic knowledge. In this research, I use the descriptive analytical approach to analyse the reasons why Muslim youths in Arab countries are seeking Islamic knowledge through online programs and engage more in social media. Therefore, I collect the data from their interaction on social media platforms. In addition to exploring the literature on online Islamic education to achieve the research aims.

As a result of modern society's swift scientific and technological advancements, the amount of accessible knowledge and continually evolving and emerging technologies has increased exponentially (Goldie, 2016). According to connectivism theory, knowledge is believed to be disseminated across an information network or among many people rather

than only existing in a person's head or in a single place. As a result, access to many information streams and the diversity of viewpoints is necessary for learning and knowledge generation. This theory is helpful for the study because it could help make sense of how the Muslim youth are shifting the way to acquire Islamic knowledge using technology. Technology may now support many operations that learning theories once handled, particularly in cognitive information processing (Siemens, 2004). Siemens stated that when knowledge is widespread, it is crucial to evaluate it quickly.

Indeed, many Muslim public figures use social media to transmit dawah and preaching, such as Mustafa Hosny, a prominent figure in televangelism and Islamic preaching. He commenced his inaugural television programme in 2004, and hence, he attained widespread recognition and popularity. However, he started his journey after showing up on TV shows. Now, he has more than 20 million followers on Instagram where he posts his da'wa videos. There is also Ahmed Abdelmomem who focuses on podcasting tafsir al-Quran and *taddabur*. Abdelmomem is a lecturer in the faculty of medicine and the co-founder of the 'This is Qur'an' website (Innahu al-Qur'an). He also has many followers. Another one who greatly influences Muslim youths is Ayman Abderheem. He has a famous course called the Muslim house course (Dawrat al-Bait al Muslim) that has attracted many Muslim youths, especially those who are about to get married.

I chose Ahmed El Sayed for this article because his videos have reached many countries, mainly Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Bahrain, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Oman. Another reason is that he adds English subtitles to some of his lectures. He also has a Twitter account for the English audience. So, he is seeking to reach more audiences. His focus is not only on preaching but on reforming. In addition, many followers from diverse backgrounds have joined his programs and followed up with his videos.

The Traditional Way to Acquire Islamic Knowledge and Its Regression

It is widely believed that something new is something ancient that has been forgotten for a long time. The development of science and technology has always depended on the sharing of knowledge, ideas, and technologies needed to develop cultural values and gain an understanding of the natural world and human civilisation. This is demonstrated by the history of humanity (St. Petersburg State University et al., 2020). This theory is derived from the notion that historical events frequently exhibit patterns of repetition and that the acquisition and comprehension of human knowledge follow cyclical patterns. As societies undergo development and advancement, they tend to unintentionally neglect or dismiss historical wisdom, only to reencounter it as a novel and pioneering concept.

Traditionally, seeking Islamic science is received by sticking with the *sheikh*. However, this way has been regressed in this era. Due to several reasons, this learning method has been replaced by a new way, which is online or digital programs. As many courses are conducted online, *ilm sharia* and Islamic knowledge are from these increasing courses,

especially from social media. Social media like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are considered effective promoters for these online Islamic courses. Other programs can help us spread these religious programs, including Zoom, YouTube, and even the possibility of broadcasting through Telegram. So, digital means are very diverse.

It is widely recognised that acquiring Islamic knowledge, conventionally, entails attending a mosque and adhering to the guidance of a *sheikh*. Alternatively, individuals may enrol formally in an Islamic university to pursue Islamic education, which often necessitates a foundation in Islamic studies. Acquiring Islamic knowledge through conventional means can provide challenges for individuals without a background in Islamic education. Nevertheless, due to the progressions in technology and the wide range of online resources, persons with varying educational backgrounds now possess the capacity to attain Islamic education through a multitude of online platforms and courses. These platforms offer a simple and flexible means for individuals to acquire knowledge about Islam and enhance their comprehension of its doctrines, irrespective of their educational experience.

The Transformation from Mosques to Social Media

Nowadays, lessons of Islamic science and sermons have moved from the mosque to social media. The sheiks now broadcast their lectures and speeches through social media platforms. Therefore, the Internet can be seen as a key element of modernity that interacts with active fundamentalist religious practices (Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, 2005). The emphasis on social media influencers indicates that religious use of social media has advanced to a new level that is distinguished by permanence and sophistication (Zaid et al., 2022). The people are more engaged with digital platforms than mosques or formal traditional universities. So, a vast transformation makes us think about its effect and results beyond this digital revolution.

For those who engage in online religious activity, there is no distinction between their offline and online experiences; instead, their religious practices and worldview are present in both settings (Helland, 2005). Therefore, people share their religiosity on the Internet because they consider it an integral part of their lives. Currently, they share their lives and activities on the Internet. They can access religious and spiritual meanings via the Internet, symbolised by diverse symbols dispersed throughout the online world. Additionally, they can communicate with other Muslims to discuss ideas, perspectives, and religious facts to further their religious practices (Fakhruroji, 2019). While interacting with social media, Muslims tend to show and confirm their identity. Young Muslims even manage to show their affiliation with certain groups. For example, the youths confirmed their affiliation with Ahmed El-Sayed's courses on Twitter, and they tweeted under a special hashtag in the name of the course and started following each other through this hashtag. The *sheikh* also calls the last batch joining his current course *duf'at al-mu'allifah qulubuhum*, the batch reconciling their hearts.

The youths interacting with the previous hashtag wrote on their accounts and con-

firmed that they were from this batch or students of this course. Any person automatically believes that they belong to a group with shared traits. These traits could be racial, religious, cultural, or a combination (Nakissa, 2021). Thus, the most significant effect of the Internet may have been the rise of virtual communities and social meetings without physical borders (Hagerty, n.d.). Despite the decline in the role of mosques and the absence of knowledge circles in most Muslim countries, especially in the Middle East, the shift to social media and online courses can be considered nothing but an outlet for young people to search for an alternative through which they confirm their identity and satisfy their desire to seek knowledge.

An Example of the Online Islamic Programmes and Their Impact on Muslim Youths

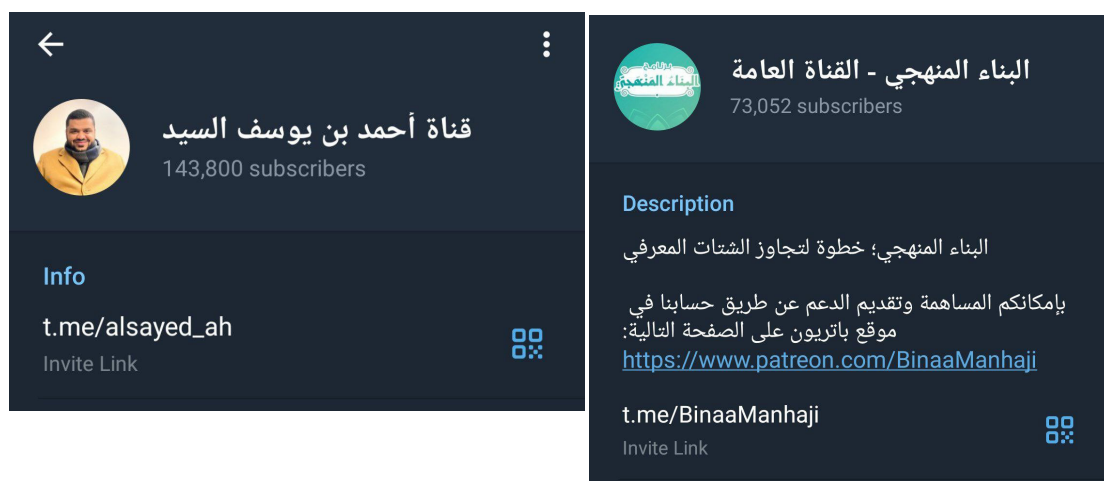
Programs that attract young people these days are the Saudi Ahmed Al-Sayed's courses. Al-Sayed is an influencer with many followers. He has two Twitter accounts: one is in Arabic, and another in English. He conducts Islamic education courses online. The most popular one is '*al-bina' al-manhaji*' (the systematic construction), which presents a systematic, organised plan to learn Islamic science. He manages to attract many Muslim youths to apply for his courses. Therefore, this course has succeeded in three batches. He started to call for a new course '*al-bina' al-fikri*' (the construction of thought). In this course, he focuses on Islamic thought rather than Islamic science. He uses Telegram to spread these courses, which have attracted many Muslim youths in the Arab world and Egypt.

Ahmed Al-Sayed grew up in Yanbu until he graduated from high school. Afterwards, he lived in Madinah. Al-Sayed began to seek Islamic Science with the care of his father from a young age. He memorised the Qur'an and the forty-Nawawi hadith. Then, in middle school, he attended the lessons of Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Ajlan in Yanbu on *Umdat Al-aḥkām* and *Umdat* in fiqh and interpretation. He took care of intellectual issues from a legal point of view. For example, he presented a number of original visual episodes on intellectual controversy among young people, especially those related to Islamic heritage. He wrote many books such as *Manhaj min Mirath al-Nubuwwa* (The Curriculum from the Inheritance of Prophecy) and *Anwar al-Anbiya* (The Lights of the Prophets), *Tafkir al-Naqid lil-Jeel al-Sa'id* (Critical Thinking for Rising Generation), *Bouslat al-Muslih* (The Compass of Reformers), and many more. He employs his books in his course but also depends on books from other authors.

Figure 1: Ahmed Al Sayed's two language accounts on Twitter



Figure 2: The channel of Ahmed Al Sayed and His Public Channel of Systematic Construction Course



One of Ahmed El-Sayed's most famous programs is the Systematic Building course, a course for studying sharia sciences and the Noble Qur'an. This course consists of three levels for approximately four years and covers a large part of the sciences. The free course is important for those who want to build a strong knowledge structure that combines legal rooting and intellectual knowledge. At the end of the course, participants are evaluated through electronic tests and research.

The programme consists of three levels. This arrangement is intended for a long-term methodological plan. So, it is directed to the youths interested in Islamic science and learning. Its aims are also manifested in five stages: rooting, building, empowerment, specialisation, and encyclopedia. The construction of this course is not different from other courses, but its long duration produces an exceptional result. The programme is characterised by its comprehensiveness, whereas other programs focus on one direction only, either the legal aspect or the cultural aspect. The programme has been designed for all ages, and one can learn for an hour a day.

The course consists of three levels and includes a course for memorising the Qur'an. The ranks of the study of each science are reflected in four items: rooting, building, empowerment, and specialisation. In the systematic construction, the three levels of each science are included. First, one will learn the forensic sciences. The second is the study of literature, thought, culture, and history. This study is parallel to the legal construction that is studied in the previous three levels. There is the memorisation of the Noble Qur'an in addition to the existence of systems and poems. This indicates that the learner must be fully aware that the programme will transfer him to a major cognitive stage after he finishes all its stages. To complete the programme, the learner must be patient, perseverant, and diligent. The curriculum construction decisions are divided into two directions. In legal construction, six sciences are studied. They are Arabic language, creed, sciences of the Noble Qur'an, hadiths, principles of jurisprudence, and jurisprudence. The second aspect is a course of intellectual and behavioural construction. There are twenty-one complete books for reading this course. Each week, many topics are studied, including Sermons, literature, thought, biographies, history, and the jurisprudence of reality and Islamic culture.

Figure 4: An Announcement for the Course and the Course Schedule

تم فتح باب التسجيل

برنامج البناء المنعرج

هل تعاني من الشكوك المعرفي
والافتقار بين البرامج دون الشعور بنتيجة علمية واضحة؟
هل تود تكوين بناء معرفي قوي يجمع بين
التأصيل الشرعي والمعرفة الفكرية؟

معلومات عن البرنامج:

- يتكون البرنامج من ٣ مستويات.
- مدة المستوى الأول ٣٦٢ يوماً علمياً.
- تتم متابعة المشاركين عبر اختبارات وجوهرات الكترونية.
- تتم الإجابة عن أسئلة المشاركين علمياً.
- للبرنامج الكتروني مجاني.
- تستند شهادة المتخرجين من البرنامج بعد كل مستوى.
- ينتهي التسجيل في ٢٩/١٢/١٤٤٠ الموافق ٢٨/١١/٢٠١٩.
- ينطلق البرنامج في ١/١/١٤٤١ الموافق ٣١/١٢/٢٠١٩.
- التسجيل في الاستمارة المرفقة.

إشراف
أ. أحمد بن يوسف السيد

نوع البرنامج	الأيام	المقرر	المطلوب تجاهه	ملاحظات
الأسبوع الأول	1	مدخل إلى علم اللغة العربية محمد العمري	كتابة محاور المادة وأهم فوائدها	من بداية الكتاب إلى ص ٣٣
	2			
	3			
	4	رقائق القرآن إبراهيم السكران	أهم فوائد الكتاب	من ص ٣٤ إلى ص ٥٣
	5			
	6			
الأسبوع الثاني	1	مدخل إلى علم اللغة العربية محمد العمري	كتابة محاور المادة وأهم فوائدها	من ص ٥٤ إلى ص ٧٨
	2			
	3			
	4	رقائق القرآن إبراهيم السكران	أهم فوائد الكتاب	من ص ٧٩ إلى ص ١٠٧
	5			
	6			
الأسبوع الثالث	1	مدخل إلى علم الحديث أحمد السيد	كتابة محاور المادة وأهم فوائدها	من ص ١٠٨ إلى ص ١٣٥
	2			
	3			
	4	في صحة السميح فهد السليبي	أهم فوائد الكتاب	من ص ١٣٦ إلى ص ١٤٤
	5			
	6			

Like the rest of the digital Islamic courses now, the study is through the Telegram application. The programme is on a private channel, meaning it can only be accessed through the channel's invitation link. Someone gets the link when he registers at the end of the course. A PDF timetable is sent for each level (each stage consists of levels). As for the second stage, there are interactive groups in which the members will share and discuss the benefits they will gain from the courses. This method gives the spirit of participation and cooperation among the learners.

Some of the Followers' Comments on the Program

We can find many stories about this course by searching on social media such as Twitter or Facebook under the hashtag '*riblati ma'a al-bina' al-manhaji*' in Arabic. Many people from different batches of this course share their experiences with that online Islamic program. One of the followers said:

Construction, as it is called, literally changed my life! Every day in this program, I draw on what nourishes my mind and heart. As for my advice to my brothers who have not registered yet, it is to take this programme seriously because whoever takes it seriously will see in themselves something that will surprise them!

Other comments confirm that the course is beneficial,

"The programme has a great share of its name. It builds the student scientifically and in a systematic way. It benefited me a lot. I learned from it that knowledge requires patience, perseverance, and not rushing to reap the fruits of knowledge honestly. A great programme that cannot be missed. It cares a lot about self-purification (knowledge is fear) in which memorising the Holy Qur'an is done by specialists.

Another person did not complete the programme, but he highly recommended people join it. He wrote.

Although I did not complete the programme shortly after. However, the programme is superior to other programs in its methodology and accuracy in choosing who to listen to and what to listen to. In addition, the explanation is fascinating and beautiful, and it introduces a person to his religion and origins, makes him a truly convinced Muslim, and protects him and protects him from doubts and doubt. A loss for those who did not catch it.

In summary, we can say that most of the followers are satisfied with the programme despite some of them not completing it for several reasons. The programme is still effective for a high number of Muslim youths. However, the programme requires discipline and consistency to achieve the levels. One of the followers said he studied engineering, but this course is more complicated than engineering. That's all because the course requires severe

discipline. The program's efficacy can be ascribed to its capacity to address the specific requirements of Muslim adolescents, furnishing them with invaluable knowledge and advice. The learning above experience provides a distinctive opportunity that overcomes the obstacles encountered in conventional academic endeavours. Despite the program's rigorous nature, numerous adherents value its emphasis on discipline as it facilitates personal and spiritual development.

Conclusion

The traditional methods of dissemination of knowledge have declined. New methods have flourished in this digital era. People can obtain knowledge just by clicking a button. Therefore, sheiks and teachers of Islamic science have to master these means to reach a larger number of people and take advantage of modern means to spread knowledge. Social media can be a means to transmit culture and information, bringing the world closer to a small village, expanding circles of knowledge, and spreading the exchange of ideas. It can also facilitate building bridges for the transfer of knowledge between generations.

So, as Siemens (2004) asserts, our brains are changing (rewiring) due to technology. Our thinking is defined and shaped by the tools we employ. Connectivism is a learning model that recognises the seismic transformations in modern society, where education is no longer a solitary pursuit. When people start using new tools, it changes how they work and act (Siemens, 2004). The transition from conventional modes of knowledge dissemination to digital platforms has not only expanded the accessibility of information but has also fundamentally altered the mechanisms through which knowledge is transmitted. The user's text is already academic in nature. One persuasive argument is rooted in the observation that the utilisation of social media and online platforms by researchers and educators in Islamic science has the potential to enhance their outreach and impact substantially. The shift towards the digital realm enables individuals to engage with a wider range of individuals and guarantees their continued significance in an era characterised by technical progress.

The ongoing transformation of knowledge acquisition and distribution due to technological advancements has led to a compelling and dynamic research area: social media's impact on Islamic scientific education. This subject is of great interest and requires additional scholarly investigation. This phenomenon offers the potential for enhanced comprehension of the evolving educational environment and the means to safeguard and distribute knowledge in the era of digitalisation. Moreover, the transfer of lessons of Islamic science from mosques to social media could be a reason for acquiring religious authority and fame. Many young people seek to interact and participate in Islamic studies courses online to fill their knowledge gap and confirm their identity by interacting with these programs on social media and sharing their achievements with others. This also has a psychological aspect, as it helps them assert themselves and get a sense of participation and achievement. However, this is still largely uncharted territory, and there is a clear need for more scholarly

research to spotlight how traditional and social media interact.

Nevertheless, despite the considerable potential advantages, this phenomenon raises significant inquiries that warrant more investigation. What are the potential long-term societal and educational consequences of the transition towards online platforms for Islamic studies? The influence of the interplay between traditional and social media on the authenticity and correctness of religious teachings is a subject of inquiry. Furthermore, conducting a more comprehensive investigation of the psychological dimensions associated with individuals' engagement with digital learning platforms is imperative, specifically focusing on the effects on their feelings of identity, involvement, and achievement.

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